

Multi-generational Employee Recruitment and Retention in Visitor Attractions in Scotland

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Objectives | The research aimed to investigate the issues associated with the attraction and retention of employees in Scottish visitor attractions and to explore issues arising as a result of an increasingly multi-generational workforce.

Methodology | The author adopted a mixed method approach to achieve the research objective, all aspects conducted in summer 2018. Secondary research was undertaken in the form of a critical literature review of CABS quality journal articles from a range of disciplines - specifically human resource management; tourism management; and business management. Key words searches identified by the authors included terms such as – visitor attraction management; visitor-facing employees; recruitment; retention; intention to leave; job satisfaction; work life balance; pay and benefits. Only articles referring directly to the research objective were included, with industry reports used to contextualise the research context.

Literature review findings were then used to identify the key issues to explore; what questions to ask; and participants to involve.

Primary research involved three forms of activity:

1. Employee perspectives gathered via electronic and paper questionnaire survey with 54 questions (209 completed)
2. Manager perspectives gathered via electronic and paper questionnaire survey (46 complete)
3. Manager perspectives gathered via semi-structured interviews (11) conducted via Teams, telephone, in person after both initial surveys conducted.

The survey data were analysed using SPSS with manual thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews, with reporting provided for each question and also by employee selected generational cohort.

Main Results and Contributions | Many employee attraction and retention practices adopted by the VAs were common across generations, with a broad range of communication platforms and inclusive processes utilized across the sector.

Several employee attraction and retention issues raised in the surveys were commonly observed across all generations in the workforce, including gaps in the opportunities that employees felt they had to demonstrate new skills; the importance of Work Life Balance; employees' perceptions that employee career progression was not important to the organization; and their desire to be more involved in decisions relating to pay and benefits.

Differences in employee attraction and recruitment features did differ between generations, with some associated with specific generations, for example, higher importance of opportunities for promotion for Gen Y; higher intention to leave for Gen X; and wanting greater involvement in management of the organization for Baby Boomers.

The authors offer a range of potential actions for VA managers to improve their employee attraction and retention practices. These include, for example, closer working with schools, colleges and universities to enhance the appeal of tourism (specifically VAs) as a career of choice; to conduct Skills Audits to establish available skills within the organisations; to devise Retention Plans for key positions; and to develop greater opportunities for promotions or, where that is not possible, job enrichment.

Limitations | The findings are specifically in relation to the visitor attractions in Scotland, although many aspects are relevant for other destinations worldwide.

Conclusions | The research has produced a significant amount of data covering a whole range of influences and issues within the employee attraction and retention of employees in Scottish visitor attractions. It is considered that this is the largest such survey conducted and that the response rate is such that the findings are significant. Therefore the findings and recommendations are of great value to both the specific visitor attraction sector, but also more widely to destination and tourism management research.

The research established many examples of excellent employee attraction and retention practices across Scottish visitor attractions. The manager surveys and interviews showed great care and consideration for employees, while the employee surveys indicated great commitment to the sector and the individual organisations.

To remain competitive, VAs are increasingly working to attract new visitors and to establish and maintain relationships to encourage repeat visitation and recommendations. With visitor expectations on the increase due to greater levels of travel and demographic demands, the visitor-facing role is assuming greater importance in the provision of high-quality visitor attraction experiences. This role has developed from a predominantly curatorial focus, to contain a vast

range of responsibilities, including interpretation, safety, security, management, all with a focus on the visitor experience. At the same time, the visitor attraction managers need to be conscious of conservation of heritage resources, in the context of the decline of traditional public funding and an increased commercial imperative.

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